

Comprehensive Tribal Fisheries Management

Introduction

Indian tribes have always lived on every major watershed in what is now Washington state. From time immemorial tribal cultures, spirituality and economies have centered on fishing, hunting and gathering the natural resources of this region. Today, there are 20 federally recognized treaty Indian tribes living on the major river systems of western Washington.

In the mid-1850s, when the United States sought to make land available in the Pacific Northwest for non-Indian settlers, treaties were signed with the tribes that guaranteed the tribes' right to harvest salmon in all of the places they had traditionally utilized.

That promise was broken in the years that followed, until 1974 when the federal district court reaffirmed the tribal right in *U.S. v. Washington*, which was subsequently upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the two decades that followed, a series of cooperative efforts, processes and policies — unique in the nation — have brought the tribes and other parties together to serve mutual needs. This holistic approach to natural resource management — which is becoming institutionalized in Washington — is built on a foundation of open participation

by tribal governments and agencies, industry and the general public. Cooperative natural resource management in Washington is aimed at achieving the common goal of protecting, restoring and enhancing the productivity and diversity of salmon and their ecosystems. This is being accomplished through a four-part approach that includes:

- ◆ Integrating natural resource management and initiating institutional changes to overcome barriers;
- ◆ Protecting and restoring habitat;
- ◆ Sustaining hatchery production to provide meaningful levels of harvest and to aid wild stock rebuilding efforts; and
- ◆ Promoting and maintaining healthy, stable fisheries.



A Quinault Indian Nation fisherman checks his net while fishing near the mouth of the Quinault River.

Tribal Fisheries Management

Each treaty Indian tribe in western Washington typically maintains an individual fishery management staff that includes a fisheries manager who oversees staff working in the areas of harvest management, enhancement, habitat protection and enforcement. In some cases, several tribes have joined together to form collective fishery management organizations.

The fisheries manager receives direction from the tribal fish committee and tribal council, which balances harvest needs with the needs of the resource itself.

Tribal harvest management staff develop fishery plans and run size forecasts, assess spawning escapement needs and monitor stock status, among other duties.

The tribal hatchery manager, with the aid of support staff, implements the tribe's enhancement program, overseeing hatchery programming and production.

Many tribes also operate shellfish programs. The tribes manage, enhance and regulate harvest of the resource, meeting stringent health and handling standards to ensure consumer protection.

Tribal habitat staff are involved in issues ranging from forest practices to urban growth. They also conduct in-stream habitat improvement and restoration projects.

Each tribe or tribal cooperative also maintains an enforcement program to ensure that fishing regulations are observed by tribal members. Tribal enforcement officers work cooperatively with state and federal fish and wildlife enforcement personnel to protect natural resources. Violations of tribal fishing laws are referred to tribal courts for prosecution.

The tribes also conduct a treaty fisherman identification and vessel registration program. When a treaty fisherman sells his catch, his identification number is included on a fish receiving ticket that records the number, weight, species and catch area of the harvested fish. The information is an important part of the Treaty

Indian Catch Monitoring Program managed by the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, which provides catch data critical to fisheries management.

Salmon Management Processes

From the moment of its birth, a Pacific Northwest salmon begins an epic journey through waters managed by several states, through waters off the U.S. and Canadian coasts, and through waters in the North Pacific before returning to the stream of its birth to spawn and die.

Fisheries in Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and nearshore coastal waters are co-managed by the treaty Indian tribes and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

As sovereign governments, each tribe regulates and coordinates its own fishery management program within its specific, adjudicated Usual and Accustomed fishing grounds. Tribal management jurisdiction includes six species of salmon, halibut, herring, shellfish and other marine species. Tribes conduct fisheries off the Washington coast, in coastal rivers and bays, and throughout the inland waters of Puget Sound and its tributaries.

WDFW manages the state's share of the salmon resource, as well as the other food fish and shellfish in this area for commercial and sport user groups.

From pre-season planning to post-season data sharing, the tribes and state work cooperatively to ensure that the needs of both the resources and those who depend on them are met.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) develops and monitors fishery management plans for waters from three to 200 miles off the Washington coast. Tribal and state representatives hold seats on the council and participate on technical committees.

In the PFMC management cycle, a wide range of factors, such as abundance, harvest quotas and economic impacts are evaluated before an ocean fisheries management plan is submitted to the Commerce Secretary for final approval and adoption. Fisheries management regimes developed by the tribes and state for waters within three miles of the coast must be consistent with PFMC plans.

Adult salmon returning to Washington migrate through both U.S. and Canadian waters and are harvested by fishermen from both countries. The 1985 Pacific Salmon Treaty, developed through cooperation by the tribes, state governments, U.S. and Canadian federal governments, and sport and commercial fishing groups, helps fulfill conservation

goals and the right of each country to reap the benefit of its own fisheries enhancement efforts.

The treaty is implemented by the eight-member bilateral Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC), which includes representatives of federal, state and tribal governments. The PSC does not regulate salmon fisheries, but provides regulatory advice and recommendations, and a forum for the two countries to reach agreement on mutual fisheries issues. Three regional panels provide technical and regulatory advice to the PSC. In years when a treaty agreement is not reached, fisheries are still managed responsibly by the tribes. Indian and non-Indian harvests are taken from a portion of the run surplus to the escape-ment needs (the number of fish needed to spawn and perpetuate the run) of the stock.

In addition to serving at the policy level on the PSC and its panels, tribal representatives also participate on the many committees and work groups which provide technical support to implement the treaty. Tribes also conduct research projects as an integral part of the treaty's implementation.

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) was created in 1974 by the treaty Indian tribes to assist them in

conducting orderly and biologically-sound fisheries and to provide member tribes with a single, unified voice on fisheries management and conservation issues. Member tribes are Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Puyallup, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, Skokomish, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit, Tulalip, Makah, Stillaguamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Nooksack, Lummi, Quinault and Quileute.

The tribes select commissioners who develop policy and provide direction. The commission's executive director supervises the staff that implements the policies and fisheries management activities approved by the commissioners. The NWIFC staff employs about 50 full-time employees in its Administration, Fishery Services, Habitat Services, and Information and Education Services divisions.

The Administration Division includes the executive director, human resources and operations administrator, director of fishery services, fishery and legislative policy analysts, and clerical and accounting departments.

The Fishery Services Program supports and promotes the fishery programs of member tribes by providing technical assistance, coordinating management programs and representing tribal management policies. The program is comprised of the Fishery Management and Planning Division, Quantitative Services

Division and Enhancement Services Division, and provides services ranging from harvest management planning to database management and fish health.

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical and policy assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. In addition, the program coordinates tribal participation in forest management processes and conducts a statewide Coordinated Tribal Water Quality Program, among other programs.

The Information and Education Division provides comprehensive public relations services to member tribes. The division produces news releases, publications and videos, and responds to numerous information requests from the public.

1998 Tribal Fisheries Program Activities

Following is a synopsis of tribal fisheries management activities during the past year:

- ◆ In response to proposed Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings for Puget Sound salmon species, bolstered emphasis on implementation of the tribal/state Wild Stock Restoration Initiative — a comprehensive effort aimed at restoring wild salmon stocks and their habitat to support the region's fisheries and economies — and continued development of a Tribal Salmon Recovery Plan.

- ◆ Developed joint fishery management regimes with the State of Washington for waters throughout western Washington; participated in development of ocean fishery management regimes through the Pacific Fishery Management Council.
- ◆ Conducted extensive data collection and monitoring necessary for Pacific Salmon Treaty implementation and for agreements in lieu of a successfully-negotiated treaty.
- ◆ Developed inter-tribal allocation plans to allow harvest opportunities for all tribes while protecting weak salmon runs.
- ◆ Closely monitored fishery harvest levels to ensure targets were not being exceeded and conducted in-season test fisheries to update run forecasts.
- ◆ Collected and compiled catch data in cooperation with the state for fisheries management planning and allocation.
- ◆ Conducted spawning surveys to confirm escapement estimates.
- ◆ Released about 39 million healthy salmon and steelhead from tribal hatcheries into western Washington waters. Returning adults will be harvested by Indians and non-Indians alike.
- ◆ Participated in cooperative enhancement projects with state and federal agencies, sportfishing groups and others.
- ◆ Tagged millions of juvenile hatchery salmon to obtain information on ocean survival, hatchery program effectiveness and other factors.
- ◆ Developed management plans for shellfish harvest and enhancement and compiled harvest data.
- ◆ Conducted shellfish health sampling on beaches subject to tribal harvest to ensure consumer safety.
- ◆ Enhanced shellfish beaches with the addition of seed and gravel.
- ◆ Conducted salmon habitat restoration projects on rivers throughout western Washington, such as removing culverts to aid fish passage.
- ◆ Reviewed and commented on thousands of Forest Practices Applications.
- ◆ Conducted on- and off-reservation water quality monitoring, developed water quality standards and continued cooperative efforts with other entities as part of statewide Coordinated Tribal Water Quality Program.

Conclusion

Natural resources in Washington state today face great challenges. The forces of economic progress and resources preservation are on a collision course, particularly with ESA listings for salmon on the horizon. Only with the combined effort of the tribes, federal, state and local governments, industry and others with a stake in natural resource management can the balance be found that will assure our children of both healthy natural resources and a healthy economy.

For More Information

For more information about the natural resource management activities of the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington, contact the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 6730 Martin Way E., Olympia, WA 98516; or call (360) 438-1180. The NWIFC home page is available on the World Wide Web at www.nwifc.wa.gov.